United Nations A/C.2/61/SR.11

General Assembly
Sixty-first session

Official Records

Distr.: General
26 October 2006

Original: English

Second Committee

Summary record of the 11th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 11 October 2006, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Intelmann ..... (Estonia)

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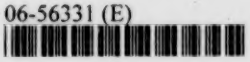
06-56331 (E)



The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 69: Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions (A/61/78-E/2006/61 and A/61/209)

(c) Participation of volunteers, "White Helmets", in the activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development (A/61/313)

1. **Mr. Bessler** (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)) introduced the Secretary-General's reports on humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation for El Salvador and Guatemala (A/61/78-E/2006/61), on humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation for selected countries and regions (A/61/209), and on the participation of volunteers, "White Helmets", in the activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development (A/61/313).

2. The report on humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation for El Salvador and Guatemala, which had previously been introduced to the Economic and Social Council, contained an analysis of the impact of tropical storm Stan on the two countries and identified the common challenges and lessons learned. It focused on the capacity of the United Nations for response and recovery, its coordination of the response, the mobilization of resources, the effective use of military assets, and the management of information. It also assessed the incorporation of risk-reduction measures in response, recovery and development processes.

3. One of the report's main recommendations was that the United Nations humanitarian agencies should reaffirm their commitment to supporting Central American Governments in the formulation and implementation of policies, strategies and institutional arrangements for risk identification, preparedness measures, and risk reduction. The report also called for increased resources to enable the United Nations to improve its coordination with the Governments concerned. Tropical storm Stan had occurred shortly after the earthquake in Pakistan, and had demonstrated how difficult it was for the international community to react to two major disasters occurring almost simultaneously.

4. The report on humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation for selected countries and regions provided information on the relief and rehabilitation assistance provided by the United Nations and its partners to those affected by natural and manmade disasters. The individual reports on each of the six countries concerned had been consolidated into a single document, in accordance with the request of the General Assembly to streamline and consolidate reports wherever possible. For each country, the report addressed the major developments and the main challenges, and then made certain recommendations.

5. As the reporting period mainly included data collected before the declaration of independence by the Republic of Montenegro, the former Serbia and Montenegro had been considered under a single heading. Future reports would address the two countries separately. In 2005, the trend towards a declining need for humanitarian assistance in Serbia and Montenegro had been reversed as a result of natural disasters such as flooding. The Serbian Government had again underscored the need to provide assistance to vulnerable persons such as refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The report therefore called on donors to continue supporting humanitarian action in Serbia.

6. The situation in Somalia was very challenging for the humanitarian community, as it included drought and access difficulties which made it very hard to meet the needs of the vulnerable population. In view of the volatile environment, the report called on donors to provide flexible emergency funding and suggested investing in the operational capacities of NGOs in particular.

7. The Secretary-General's report on the participation of "White Helmets" in the activities of the United Nations covered the period from July 2003 to July 2006, and provided an overview of the activities of the Government of Argentina's "White Helmets" initiative. The report addressed programme activities, including the dissemination of the underlying concept and the response given to requests from Governments or the United Nations for emergency assistance. The "White Helmets" initiative offered proof of the

effectiveness of standby arrangements that could provide assistance in a flexible and economic manner, and showed that all countries had the ability to make a similar contribution.

8. **Ms. Sekkenes** (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) also introduced the Secretary-General's report on humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation for selected countries and regions (A/61/209), which had been jointly prepared by OCHA and UNDP. The support provided by UNDP to the countries reviewed in the report included support for early recovery efforts and for building national capacities and addressing future crises and their root causes.

9. Despite the diverse characteristics of the six countries, most showed positive trends with respect to their distinct challenges. However, several constraints remained, and a common feature was the need for continued humanitarian assistance to support further progress. In the transition from a humanitarian to a development context, capacity-building frequently featured in the report as a continued need in a number of different areas. Furthermore, there was a need for support and assistance in involving civil society in the process of achieving poverty reduction, democratic institutions and development.

10. Building upon the successful provision of support in critical areas, UNDP was supporting Angola in creating lasting institutional capacities for the transparent and accountable management of natural wealth and resources, as well as in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In Liberia, UNDP had invested significantly in transitional recovery efforts, especially in the area of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. It was also supporting efforts to build the capacities of new national institutions for the delivery of public goods and services, and was likely to step up those efforts in the near future. Particular emphasis would be placed on institutions that developed and implemented macroeconomic policy.

11. Mozambique had recently been affected by HIV/AIDS, drought and cholera, but had shown remarkable leadership and foresight in building its own capacities for addressing those crises. UNDP was heavily involved in directly supporting, as well as coordinating, international assistance, and expected to increase that support in the near future. It would continue to support area-based programmes in Serbia, with particular regard to the sustainable resettlement of the remaining IDPs in Kosovo and other areas. UNDP supported the conclusions of the Secretary-General's report with regard to sustainable development in the new Republic of Montenegro. Programmes to increase the social inclusion of vulnerable groups and build social cohesion in general, develop systems to improve the management of natural and tourism resources, and accelerate the reform of public administration would be the main priorities of UNDP assistance to the country.

12. UNDP was currently supporting an extensive, district-based peacebuilding project in Somalia. It had also been providing significant assistance over the past 10 years for efforts to reduce the influx of small arms, disarm and demobilize combatants and improve the delivery of basic needs and services at the local level. However, many of those initiatives and gains had been threatened by the recent upsurge in violent conflict. Should an agreement be reached between the Transitional Federal Government of the Somali Government and the Islamic Courts Union on issues such as the merging of their security forces into a common security structure, power sharing at the national and local levels, and the process for drafting a common Constitution, UNDP stood ready to provide the relevant technical support.

13. **Mr. Fuks** (Argentina), speaking as President of the White Helmets Commission of Argentina, welcomed the Secretary-General's report on the participation of "White Helmets" in the activities of the United Nations, recommending to the United Nations system the concept of pre-identified standby teams of trained volunteers.

14. The Argentine delegation would submit a draft resolution aimed at enhancing the establishment of volunteer networks with a view to combating hunger and poverty within the context of efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and preventing and mitigating the damage created by emergency situations and disasters. The draft resolution would reflect the key aspects of the working methods of the "White Helmets". It would stress the establishment of mechanisms facilitating local management of risk situations and the development of regional networks that could respond rapidly and effectively to emergency situations and disasters. Combating hunger required the commitment of all countries to establish a system that was effective and reached those in need. In that context, working together with Brazil and

Guatemala, the White Helmets Commission of Argentina would seek to establish partnerships with the World Food Programme (WFP). The international community had on many occasions demonstrated its commitment to assist populations in need, and the integration of volunteers into the operational mechanisms of the United Nations system would provide a further means to achieve that goal.

15. **Ms. Heikkilä** (Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the European Union would comment on the reports in a statement at a plenary meeting of the General Assembly.

16. **Mr. Pankin** (Russian Federation) said that the Russian Federation's main statement on strengthening humanitarian coordination would be made at a plenary meeting of the General Assembly, but that he would comment on the Secretary-General's report (A/61/209). His delegation agreed that Angola, Liberia and Mozambique had moved from an emergency assistance phase to a development phase, because assistance had reached the groups who most needed it: refugees and internally displaced people. However, the report did not analyse in detail the ongoing problems with those same groups in Serbia. Those people had been forced to flee their homes in the Serbian territory of Kosovo and other parts of the former Yugoslavia to seek temporary refuge elsewhere in Serbia and neighbouring countries. They had been away from their homes for years and were therefore entitled to humanitarian assistance under the humanitarian principles, which should in turn be governed by the principles of neutrality and impartiality. It was pointless to await the final status of the Serbian province of Kosovo as proposed in the report, since under international law those people should be allowed to return home no matter what the outcome.

17. The Russian delegation supported the recommendation made in resolution 2006/5 of the Economic and Social Council that the item should be reallocated to the plenary of the General Assembly.

18. **Ms. Manuel** (Angola) regretted that the Secretary-General's report (A/61/209) failed to outline the steps and results of implementation of resolution 59/216. The analysis should reflect the measures and practices that had contributed to implementation, so that best practices and less successful practices might be identified. Realizing that it bore the primary responsibility for improving its humanitarian situation and creating the conditions for long-term development and poverty reduction, Angola recognized that lasting peace and stability were a prerequisite for attaining those objectives. As a participant in the African Peer Review Mechanism, Angola was committed to good economic, social and political governance.

19. With the end of the armed conflict in 2002, the Government of Angola had set out a strategy and national development programmes for the years 2002 to 2006 to combat poverty and address the issues of social reintegration, demining, rural development and food safety, HIV/AIDS, education, rehabilitation of infrastructure, employment, professional training, macroeconomic administration and good governance. The programmes had succeeded in stabilizing the economy and improving social indicators. In addition, the Government of Angola had devised an Operational Plan to address HIV/AIDS. Those programmes were beset by a lack of resources and institutional capacity to maintain them. Politically, Angola's priority was to consolidate its democratic system and the rule of law to ensure political stability, human rights and economic development.

20. Despite progress, Angola continued to face the challenges of reconstruction and reintegration of internally displaced persons, refugees and former combatants. International assistance, although no longer within the realm of humanitarian assistance, remained essential. Her delegation appealed to the Committee to consider countries that, like Angola, were in transition towards economic growth and sustainable development. Her delegation supported the inclusion of an item in the agenda of the United Nations that would allow the debate and adoption of political recommendations to improve the institutional capacity and resources for countries like Angola, and expressed its gratitude to the donors and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes for the assistance provided to Angola.

21. **Mr. Kruljević** (Serbia) welcomed the Secretary-General's acknowledgment in his report (A/61/209) that the United Nations would continue to seek support for Serbia from the international community in the next two to three years. Serbia's living standards had improved, but the country continued to suffer from high unemployment, inflation, poverty and a large number of refugees. Reducing or ending international assistance would undermine the transition from humanitarian assistance to long-term economic

development and impede reforms. Serbia still sheltered thousands of refugees and internally displaced people. Although the conflict had ended many years earlier, assistance was still needed for local integration and repatriation. Serbia was particularly interested in receiving assistance to implement its National Strategy for the Resolution of the Problems of Refugees and Displaced Persons and would soon be creating a legal framework to implement local integration, particularly with regard to housing problems.

22. The Government of Serbia was also committed to cooperating with other States and partners to successfully implement the Sarajevo Declaration and thus eliminate the remaining obstacles to repatriation. It appreciated the decision by the United Kingdom to allocate financial assistance for the return of internally displaced persons, and expected that the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) would continue to be implemented. He expressed gratitude for the humanitarian assistance provided through the United Nations and hoped that it would continue for as long as was necessary.

23. **Mr. Al-Hajrey** (Kuwait) commended the international community for the cooperation and generosity it had displayed in coordinating the massive relief efforts for the victims of the Asian tsunami of 2004, Hurricane Katrina, the hurricanes that had struck the Caribbean region and the earthquakes that had struck Pakistan and Bam in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

24. While the United Nations had played a prominent role in disaster relief efforts through its various agencies, programmes and offices, he urged the Organization to improve coordination in order better to respond to disasters. In that regard, the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund was a step in the right direction. Kuwait provided bilateral assistance to disaster-afflicted countries or regions. It had provided more than $1 billion in relief assistance during the past few years and closely cooperated with and made financial contributions to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

25. The scope of recent natural disasters and the loss of human life and damage to economic and social infrastructures, especially in developing countries, required the international community to strengthen its coordination and intensify its solidarity in order to overcome those crises, or at least mitigate their effects. A regional early-warning system should be established to mitigate the consequences of disasters, particularly in high-risk areas. The developed countries should help the developing countries to set up such a system and to strengthen infrastructure by lending the necessary technical assistance.

26. Kuwait would not only continue its bilateral and multilateral donations in response to disasters but would donate to rebuilding efforts through its various development and relief agencies such as the Kuwait Fund for Economic Development and the Kuwait Red Crescent Society.

27. **Mr. Yao** Wenlong (China) commended the United Nations and the international community for their concerted efforts and achievements in providing Angola, Liberia, Mozambique, Serbia, Montenegro, Somalia, El Salvador and Guatemala with emergency and humanitarian relief and support for their economic recovery. Although most of those countries had moved on to post-disaster rehabilitation, reconstruction and development, they were still in dire need of financial support from the international community to enable them to meet the daunting economic recovery challenges impeding their progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

28. Although the United Nations system had raised some funds for the countries in question through the Consolidated Appeal Process, the funding level was far from the projected target. Commitments of assistance should be honoured as soon as possible, and his delegation urged the developed countries to contribute generously and provide countries struck by disasters, the least developed countries in particular, with additional humanitarian relief and reconstruction assistance.

29. As a disaster-prone developing country, China knew only too well the suffering that disaster brought to local populations. In the past year his Government had actively participated in major international emergency relief operations and, through bilateral and multilateral channels, had provided some affected countries with emergency humanitarian assistance in

cash and in kind. The Government and people of China would continue to support the United Nations system in its disaster relief and reconstruction efforts.

30. **Mr. Sardenberg** (Brazil) said that the efforts of the United Nations system to address the funding and strategic planning gap between relief and development activities in the context of natural and man-made disasters must reflect the Millennium Development Goals. The United Nations should focus on capacity-building of national institutions in order to create favourable conditions for the development of sustainable nationally owned strategies.

31. Such efforts were particularly important in countries emerging from conflict. His delegation was encouraged by recent positive developments in Angola in the context of the peace process and commended the Government of Angola for its post-conflict recovery efforts. His country fully supported Angola's peacebuilding efforts and, along with other developing countries, was engaged in maximizing South-South cooperation there, in particular with respect to infrastructure and capacity-building.

32. With regard to Liberia, the current transition from humanitarian assistance to development was severely affected by the phasing out of activities by many critical NGOs and by funding difficulties. Funds must be administered and allocated more efficiently in order to maximize the use of resources to address chronically under-funded situations.

33. With regard to Mozambique, an integrated comprehensive approach to cooperation consistent with the Millennium Development Goals was urgently needed to address the country's requirements. An adequate and efficient response to the challenges posed by that triple threat of widespread HIV/AIDS, food shortages and institutional deficiencies would be possible only in the context of efforts to eradicate hunger and poverty. The Action Plan for the Reduction of Absolute Poverty was a key element of the effort to cope with that triple threat. His delegation commended the Government of Mozambique for its success thus far in tackling the many challenges that country faced and welcomed the contributions of the United Nations system to further develop the capacity of the National Disaster Management Institute in the areas of information, communication and advocacy.

34. As the section of document A/61/209 concerning Somalia and Montenegro indicated, in order to address the plight of internally displaced persons, the delivery of humanitarian aid was critical in order to mitigate the most harmful effects of conflicts.

35. The impact of tropical storm Stan in Guatemala and El Salvador and of the eruption of the Ilamatepec volcano in El Salvador, described in document A/61/78, demonstrated the challenges faced by countries in Central America and the Caribbean and the need for prompt assistance by the United Nations system, in close cooperation with their Governments and civil society. His delegation agreed with the Secretary-General that it was essential to protect highly vulnerable groups in the region, including indigenous populations, who as a rule suffered the most when natural disasters struck.

36. As the reports of the Secretary-General under consideration indicated, humanitarian assistance must be part of a broader approach encompassing recovery and reconstruction. In discharging their respective mandates, United Nations institutions must enhance the coordination of their efforts in order to facilitate implementation of a comprehensive approach and avoid setbacks in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

37. **Mr. Barnes** (Liberia) welcomed the insightful report in document A/61/209 and commended the Secretary-General for his personal efforts and unwavering commitment to the rebuilding and recovery process in his country. Nine months into the administration of the new Government, considerable progress had been made in advancing that process. In particular, the authority of the State had been consolidated throughout the country. Additional positive developments included the rehabilitation and reintegration of former combatants; reform of the National Police and reconstitution of the Armed Forces of Liberia; the promotion of human rights and the rule of law; and restoration of proper management of natural resources.

38. His country commended the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union, the United Nations system, bilateral and multilateral donors, and governmental and non-governmental organizations for their continued moral support and their financial and other assistance for the recovery process. His Government encouraged active dialogue with all its partners in order to translate that goodwill and commitment into tangible programmes.

39. His Government was fully aware that the task of rebuilding Liberia rested with Liberians, and it appealed to its partners for their indulgence as the country struggled to shift from aid and humanitarian efforts directed at relieving human suffering to efforts to achieve sustainable development.

40. In pursuit of that objective, his Government had implemented prudent fiscal policies to improve revenue generation and curb corruption. It had also embraced the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program and other reform initiatives, including civil service reform and the empowerment of local governments. At two United Nations-sponsored meetings between the Government and its development partners, in July and September 2006, his country had outlined its development agenda, which was based on four pillars: security; good governance and the rule of law; economic revitalization and infrastructure; and basic services for recovery, reconstruction and development. Participants had indicated that they were encouraged by the direction his country had taken. The convening of a donor conference for the reconstruction and development of Liberia had also been suggested to the donor community.

41. His Government welcomed the extension by the Security Council of the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Liberia to March 2007 and the Council's determination not to consider plans for premature withdrawal of troops, which could endanger the security of the country. Notwithstanding the progress made in recent months, the situation in Liberia remained fragile and could pose a threat to peace and security in the subregion. It was to be hoped that his country could continue to rely on the support and empathy of the international community.

42. **Mr. Aguirre** (Guatemala) said that his country continued to suffer the effects of the 2005 hurricane season. In fact, OCHA had called for an additional four million dollars for the World Food Programme and for further donations to the Natural Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Programme in aid of Guatemala.

43. The reconstruction effort in Guatemala had involved the central Government, local institutions, departmental and municipal bodies and, above all, civil society. Looking to the future, Guatemala had developed a management risk strategy together with the affected population that focused on strengthening the social fabric; creating a national sustainable infrastructure; supporting economic and productive security; and managing water basins. The different reconstruction projects included highway and bridge reconstruction, water basin protection, agricultural production, housing and food support.

44. Sustainable development and disaster risk management were closely linked, particularly as disasters typically struck the poorest sectors of the population. The Government of Guatemala welcomed the international community's efforts to coordinate actions and was especially grateful for the assistance of the Coordination Centre for Natural Disaster Prevention in Central America.

45. In conclusion, Guatemala called on all nations to cooperate in meeting the challenges of disaster reduction and pledged to strengthen its own disaster reduction strategy.

46. **Mr. Kaludjerović** (Montenegro) said that the number of refugees and displaced persons residing in Montenegro had fallen from 22 per cent of the population to 4 per cent over the past seven years. With the help of international organizations, many humanitarian challenges had been resolved; recently, however, assistance for refugees and displaced persons had been drastically reduced.

47. After Montenegro had regained its independence, the Government had decided that displaced persons from the former Yugoslavia, including Kosovo, would maintain their status and rights until the new laws on citizenship and asylum were adopted. The new laws met international standards and had received a positive reaction from the international community.

48. Montenegro had already signed the Sarajevo Declaration of Friendship and Partnership and planned to conclude special bilateral agreements on refugee return with Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia. It had also started to implement a cooperation protocol with the office of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and was taking steps to accelerate its accession to certain United Nations international agreements, declarations and protocols dealing with refugee matters.

49. The Government had adopted its first report on the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for 2003-2004. Given that Montenegro was a country in transition, the percentage of absolute poverty was relatively small. However, some extremely

poor vulnerable groups did exist, primarily among internally displaced persons and the Roma population.

50. Finally, the Government had adopted several important strategic documents in the field of environmental protection, waste management and housing, which had been brought into line with the standards and directives of the European Union and international conventions.

51. **Ms. Interiano** (El Salvador) said that her Government welcomed the immediate response of OCHA following the tropical storm Stan and the eruption of the Ilamatepec volcano in 2005. That support had enabled the Government to promptly assess the damage which, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), amounted to more than $350 million. The Government also recognized the assistance of the non-governmental organizations and private corporations in rebuilding the social infrastructure.

52. Although it agreed with the overall content of the Secretary-General's report (A/61/78-E/2006/61), the Government of El Salvador wished to make a clarification with respect to the statement in paragraph 26 that there was "still no system in Guatemala and El Salvador that centrally records the financial aid ... received". While it was true that there was no central mechanism that recorded the amount of aid received, the Salvadorian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had requested and recorded international humanitarian assistance through an ad hoc body set up to respond to natural disaster emergency situations in El Salvador.

53. Central America's special vulnerability to natural disasters limited its ability to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The Government of El Salvador agreed that the United Nations should support the Governments of the region in the establishment of information management systems to inform timely and adequate decision-making in emergency situations and that such systems should include recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction perspectives in order to facilitate reconstruction plans.

54. According to the assessment conducted by ECLAC, quantitatively, the greatest impact of the disasters of October 2005 was felt in the social sector. There had been qualitative implications for different population sectors, in particular vulnerable groups with home-based businesses, such as women, small farmers and owners of small businesses. Their situation required a short-term strategy to restore production capacity and income.

55. El Salvador hoped that all Member States would reflect on the disaster situations that had recently occurred in different parts of the world and re-evaluate their commitments and decisions accordingly.

56. **Ms. Armanni Sequi** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)) said that coordination at the national level must be led by the Governments of countries affected by disasters. IFRC Societies were typically members of national disaster management mechanisms, a presence that was vital for ensuring that the community was represented throughout disaster preparedness and response efforts. IFRC also had 98 million volunteers who mobilized friends, families and neighbours to ensure that even people in the most remote areas were reached.

57. The international humanitarian system had significantly improved its response capability over the past year. Although work on the cluster system was far from complete, that was a promising arrangement in terms of coordination, especially as it was adaptable to different situations and participants. That flexibility had enabled IFRC to sign a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan to formalize the Federation's leadership of the emergency shelter cluster in natural disasters.

58. In May 2006 IFRC had led the Emergency Shelter Coordination Group (ESCG) following the Yogyakarta earthquake in Indonesia. Although ESCG had successfully achieved its goals and fulfilled its mandate, the Federation planned to review the Group's work to study the lessons learned and their proper integration into the cluster system. Details concerning those lessons would be found in her written statement circulated to the members of the Committee.

59. Challenges clearly remained with respect to the coordination of humanitarian assistance. As the response to natural disasters in various parts of the world over the past year had demonstrated, better preparedness in each case would have saved many lives and reduced much of the physical impact. Moreover, in the current recovery stage, too little attention was being paid to building preparedness for the future. Accordingly, as the Secretary-General himself had indicated, it was imperative to obtain a real and measurable commitment of States and donors to

integrating preparedness and risk reduction activities in humanitarian response efforts. She described a number of international disaster preparedness activities in which IFRC played a key role.

60. For example, the Federation was engaged in a thorough assessment of a very important dialogue it had hosted in July 2006 in Geneva among the leaders of some 40 United Nations and non-United Nations humanitarian organizations. The dialogue, chaired by the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator, had concluded that there was a need for a new global platform comprising the United Nations system, NGOs and the International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement to function as a steering committee. The Committee's country focus could facilitate future operational coordination.

The meeting rose at noon.